

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4314

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN REACTION TO SNYDER AGREEMENT

FOR ARA/PAN

SUMMARY: MAJOR NEWSPAPERS JUNE 27 CONTAINED FRONT-PAGE TREATMENT OF SNYDER AMENDMENT, BUT HEADLINES AND ARTICLES FOCUSED ON THE USG OPPOSITION TO THE AMENDMENT. GENERAL TORRIJOS' EXPRESSION OF HIS CONFIDENCE THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD MAINTAIN ITS COMMITMENT TO NEGOTIATE AND IN THE MEN CHARGED WITH IMPLEMENTING THIS COMMITMENT RECEIVED EquALLY PROMINENT COVERAGE. THIS TREATMENT WAS DUE TO TORRIJOS' DECISION TO TRY TO MINIMIZE ANTI-U.S. REACTION OF PANAMANIANS TO THE AMENDMENT. NEVERTHELESS, EMBASSY SOURCE CLOSE TO TOP GOP LEADERS TOLD EMBOFF THAT TORRIJOS AND OTHERS ARE SHOCKED, FRUSTRATED AND WORRIED BY THE PASSAGE OF THE AMENDMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PANAMANIAN POLITICS. END SUMMARY.

1. ALL LOCAL NEWSPAPERS JUNE 27, IN COVERING THE SNYDER AMENDMENT, EMPHASIZED THE USG OPPOSITION TO THE AMENDMENT AND HIGHLIGHTED TORRIJOS' CONFIDENCE THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD LIVE UP TO ITS COMMITMENT. THUS "MATUTINO'S" TWO MAJOR HEADLINES WERE, "I BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL MAINTAIN ITS COMMITMENT

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TO NEGOTIATE--TORRIJOS" AND "STRONG OPPOSITION IN WASHINGTON

TO THE AMENDMENT OF JAMES SNYDER". "CRITICA", FOR ITS PART, HAD THE FOLLOWING: "NORTH AMERICAN GOVERNMENT OPPOSES SABOTAGE OF THE TREATY" AND SECOND ARTICLE CONTAINING TORRIJOS' STATEMENT. THE INDEPENDENT "LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA" HAD SIMILAR ARTICLE WITH A HEADLINE CITING TORRIJOS' CONFIDENCE IN THE U.S. OFFICIALS. THE BASIS FOR THESE STORIES WAS THE PRESS STATEMENT BY STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS.

2. THE FULL TEXT OF TORRIJOS' STATEMENT AS PUBLISHED IN THE PRESS FOLLOWS: "THE WORRY OF SOME NORTH AMERICAN LEGISLATORS OVER EXPENDITURES FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS IS UNDERSTANDABLE AFTER 11 LONG YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS IN WHICH WE PANAMANIANS ARE EXHAUSTING OUR PATIENCE BUT EACH DAY INCREASING THE UNITY OF THE COUNTRY AND THE PATRIOTISM OF ALL PANAMANIANS. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL HONOR ITS COMMITMENT TO NEGOTIATE MADE BY SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER AND SPECIAL AMBASSADOR BUNKER. I BELIEVE IN THAT COMMITMENT AND IN THE ACTION OF THE MEN DIRECTLY COMMITTED TO ITS FULFILLMENT".

3. SOURCE CLOSE TO TOP GOVERNMENT LEADERS TOLD EMBOFF TODAY THAT THE INITIAL IMPACT OF THE NEWS CONCERNING THE SNYDER AMENDMENT CAUSED A DEEP FEELING OF FRUSTRATION, DISAPPOINTMENT AND WORRY IN PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL CIRCLES. SOURCE SIAD OFFICIALS HAD DESCRIBED CONGRESSIONAL ACTION AS "ABSURD" AND "IRRESPONSIBLE" AND WERE CONCERNED OVER THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. THEY ARE AWARE THAT THEY ARE CONFRONTED WITH EXPLOSIVE SITUATION REQUIRING CAREFUL MANAGEMENT. COLUMNIST CAMILO PEREZ TOLD EMBOFF LAST NIGHT HE INTENDS TO DO COLUMN STATING THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S NEXT VISIT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY AND UNDERSTANDABLY BE POSTPONED SO HE CAN WORK TO UNDO DAMAGE IN U.S. PEREZ SAID HIS ARTICLE WILL ADVISE PANAMANIANS TO HAVE PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING.

4. COMMENT: TORRIJOS' DECISION TO ACT PROMPTLY TO ASSURE PANAMANIANS OF GOOD INTENTIONS OF U.S. OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS RESPONSIBILITY HAS UNDOUBTEDLY HELPED DAMPEN POPULAR REACTION HERE. NEVERTHELESS, ELEMENTS OPPOSED TO TREATY COMBINED WITH TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITY PROVIDED THEM BY THE SNYDER AMENDMENT.

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